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## Professionalism in mountain tourism and the claims to professional status of the International Mountain Leader

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Mountain Guides and International Mountain Leaders (IMLs) have achieved cross-border recognition of their professional awards. This allows them to work internationally and provides a rare example of an established, state-sanctioned and respected professional group operating within the tourism industry. As it grows, this industry is increasingly looking to elements of professionalism to provide education and training programmes with the status and credibility that can sustain both industry development and public confidence. The case for professionalism amongst IMLs is examined through an in-depth study of the French and British award schemes. Despite their very different origins, histories and cultures, both schemes train and assess candidates for the IML award and have been selected here because they are the largest and oldest of their kind. This comparative study's focus on the structural elements of these two schemes allows certain aspects of the IML's claim to professional status to be evaluated. First, a framework outlining the defining features of professionalism is explicated. This framework is then used as an analytical tool to evaluate the degree to which the French and British IML schemes can be considered professional. This study concludes that the international accreditation of standards within the field of Mountain Leading, together with the monopolisation of key practices and bodies of knowledge, have contributed to the professionalisation of this area of tourism. There remains much scope, however, for the profession to develop effective and meaningful deontological codes and disciplinary procedures that can further uphold professional standards.

**Keywords:** mountain tourism; mountain professionals; professionalism; International Mountain Leader; Mountain Guides

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### Mountain tourism and mountain professionals

The mountain tourism industry has emerged across the world as a valuable source of employment and development in communities that were previously remote and reliant on subsistence forms of agriculture (Beedie & Hudson, 2003; Boujrouf, Bruston, Duhamel, Knafou, & Sacareau, 1998; Boumaza, 1996; Cousquer, 2014; Godde, Price, & Zimmermann, 2000; Sacareau, 2009). Two distinct mountain professionals have today established themselves within this industry: The emergent and evolving nature of the identities of the International Mountain Leader (IML) and International Mountain Guide continue to be negotiated, however, and reflect an ongoing struggle for territory, identity and capital. The heterogeneous and divergent nature of the professional practices of the IML and Mountain Guide can be characterised as a struggle for territory, but this masks the common history, traditions and culture that underpin both professions.

Guiding emerged as an early form of seasonal employment and these guides were thus peasant guides or ‘guides paysan’, also known as ‘passeurs’ (pathfinders) or ‘marrons’ (de Bellefon, 2003, pp. 120–140). They were much used by the early explorers and pioneers who needed someone who could ‘lead the way’ into unknown, potentially dangerous areas (Cohen, 1985, p. 17). In the Alps, their role evolved from that of the early pathfinders and was essentially an instrumental one. Indeed, for many of the older guides interviewed by de Bellefon (2003, pp. 73–74), guiding was a necessity of mountain life that became vocational rather than a vocation born of a passion for mountaineering. As such, it clearly made use of everyday tacit knowledge acquired through living in the mountains.

The need for a wider skill set and the transition from instrumental to communicative activities (Cohen, 1985) is clearly evidenced in the development of a range of services that met the needs of a changing clientele and responded to a reinvention of the mountain environment that placed new value on its discovery, exploration and conquest. For Mountain Guides this is reflected in the growing body of knowledge and requirement for technical proficiency, much of which could only be provided through formal training. This training was formalised and received official sanction when, in 1948, the French created an élite training centre, the *École Nationale de Ski et d’Alpinisme* (ENSA), to prepare Mountain Guides for the diploma that was now a legal requirement for those wishing to take paying clients into the high mountains. Alpinism and skiing thus became élite sports with the Mountain Guides and ski instructors of the ENSA, trained to perform and instruct at the highest level. Concurrently, mountaineering firmly established itself as a sport with its own international governing body, the Union Internationale des Associations d’Alpinisme (UIAA),<sup>1</sup> being founded in 1932. Mountain Guides, however, find themselves positioned ‘at the interface of the two social worlds of mountaineering and tourism’ (Beedie, 2003, p. 153). Corneloup (2004) emphasises the

importance of culture and tradition in the enculturation of the alpinist, whilst Beedie (2003) similarly emphasises the apprenticeship that must be served in order to become a mountaineer. Less committed mountaineers may still engage with the sport and practice of mountaineering on a more occasional basis, but would likely require instruction and guiding from a Mountain Guide in order to undertake a *grande course*; the committed mountaineer would, by contrast, be relatively self-sufficient. By contrast, the adventure tourist is not committed to these ideals and seeks, instead, to experience a range of adventurous activities in the mountains and buy into the cultural capital that this affords them on their return home (Beedie, 2003, p. 636).

The sporting character of these activities varies, with some demanding significantly more effort, commitment and exposure to danger than others. Some such mountain tourism activities (e.g. trekking) thrive on relative inaccessibility, and demand considerable effort on the part of the tourist in order to access backcountry areas. Difficult access usually means a lower volume of tourists and presents Mountain Guides and Leaders with the opportunity to develop high-value tourism products (Nepal & Chipeniuk, 2005). Other activities with wider appeal can, by contrast, be undertaken within easy reach of tourism centres<sup>2</sup> and offer Guides and Leaders opportunities to develop low-value bulk products.

The founding of the ENSA not only helped establish alpinism as a sport, but also fundamentally redefined both the guide's relationship with clients and the environment (de Bellefon, 2003, p. 110), by allowing them to secure the cultural, economic and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991, 1996) that came from establishing themselves as full-time professionals.

For Boutroy (2006), the professionalisation of Nepalese Mountain Guides follows a similar path, with the best local guides seeking recognition as professional alpinists so that they transcend their image as mere auxiliaries (p. 173). This often meant travelling to France to complete their training as Mountain Guides. In 2012, however, Nepal was unanimously accepted as a member of the *Union Internationale des Associations de Guides de Montagne* that today has 23 member countries whose national courses it accredits. In this way the élite alpinist culture that de Bellefon (2003, pp. 87–92) identifies as a key influence on the guiding profession, is propagated. Boutroy (2006) describes the grafting of professional knowledge and techniques onto a foreign culture as 'cultural proselytism' (p. 174). Beedie (2003) acknowledges that the rules governing established mountaineering practice both choreograph the adventure and perpetuate western traditions of mountaineering (p. 147). Setting aside the problems associated with the imposition of Euro-American ideas, there is little doubt that international standardisation contributes to the setting of the highest professional standards within alpinism and the practice of Mountain Guiding. This presumably translates reliably into the highest possible safety standards.

In recognition of the need to promote professional and safety standards across Europe, the EU is currently seeking to develop a European Professional Card (EPC) that will allow qualified professionals to move across borders and make it easier for authorities to check on qualifications. The EU is particularly interested in professions whose ‘members regularly cross borders, where members are trained and assessed to the same standards and where there is a health and safety issue for members of the public’ (Cliff, 2013, p. 31). Four professions have been identified to launch the EPC, which will be adopted by nation states over the next two years and become fully operational in early 2016. These four professions include Mountain Guides, alongside doctors, nurses and engineers.

The professional Mountain Guide’s focus on alpinism (i.e. skiing, climbing and glacial travel) left room for a second mountain professional to emerge: the Mountain Leader was permitted to undertake those mountain walking activities, including snowshoeing, that were not explicitly the preserve of the Mountain Guide (Cousquer & Beames, forthcoming). This activity has become increasingly specialised to the extent that there is now an internationally recognised professional award in this field: the IML award. It is their claim to professional status<sup>3</sup> that is examined here.

Elsewhere within tourism, the concept of professionalism is little addressed and often ‘concerned with broad assumptions and sociological interpretations’ (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004, p. 39). It is, however, increasingly looked to as a means of raising standards and improving services (Ap & Wong, 2001; Sheldon, 1989), and informing the development of educational programmes within the industry (Hjalager, 2003; Hjalager & Andersen, 2001; Hussey, Holden, & Lynch, 2010) – all of which serve to build public confidence.

The scarcity of knowledge as to what professionalism is and could be, together with a lack of consistency in the use of the terminology that surrounds the concept (Arnold, 2002; Carr, 2000; Sciulli, 2005) remains problematic. Professionalism is, nevertheless, a key theme in the global sociologies of work, occupations, professions and organisations (Evetts, 2013), where shared identities and values can be produced and reproduced through travel, professional training and socialisation (Boussard, 2008; Dubar & Tripier, 1998). This field of study invites academic scrutiny and this comparative case study of an established mountain profession operating within the tourism industry, provides a unique opportunity to consider the basis on which this particular claim to professional status is made, how it can further be developed within the field, and the lessons for sectors of the industry that have yet to gain this recognition.

This paper first presents an account of the emergence of the professional IML before then undertaking a comprehensive review of the literature on professionalism. This review establishes a detailed framework that allows the structural elements of the two oldest and largest national training and assessment schemes to be studied in order to determine the ways in which these schemes reflect, structure and inform the IML’s claim to professional status.



### ***The IML***

The ML, or *Accompagnateur*, emerged in Britain during the 1960s and in France during the 1970s in response to a demand within the outdoor education and mountain tourism industries for trained and competent leaders to guide members of the public in the mountains (AEM, 1992; Cousquer & Beames, forthcoming; Loader, 1952). This ‘guiding’ with a small ‘g’ emerged, in France, in the shadow of the *Guide de Haute Montagne*, who had secured a monopoly over skiing, climbing and glacial travel. Mountain Leading was therefore very much a walking award, which has, nevertheless, emerged as a respected qualification that has become increasingly recognised internationally.

In 1989, the *Commission Européenne des Accompagnateurs en Montagne* (CEAM) was formed by Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Ireland, Spain and the UK. Three years later, a common platform document established the standard for conditions of access to and practice of the profession of European Mountain Leader (EML) (CEAM, 1992). In 2004, the CEAM became the Union of International Mountain Leaders (UIMLA), with France and the UK as two of its founding members (BAIML, 2008, p. 4). Argentina, Germany, Macedonia and Slovakia are ‘aspirant’ members; their courses undergoing harmonisation before they can be admitted to the élite group of full members that includes France (2200 IMLs), the UK (336),<sup>4</sup> Switzerland (190), Spain (150), Poland (82), Belgium (42) and Andorra (22) (Ragné, 2010, p. 9), together with Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Holland and Peru. UIMLA is thus striving to ‘promote the profession of International Mountain Leader and to reinforce its identity beyond Europe’ (BAIML, 2008, p. 4).

This shift in vision, from European to International, has seen the EML consigned to history and a new mountain professional emerge: the IML. Tourism is perhaps the quintessential global market and, as with other internationalised markets, requires the reconceptualisation of professional jurisdictions (Evetts, 2013, p. 2) and the recognition of other states’ licensing and training systems (Evetts, 2008; Orzack, 1998).

Recognition of another country’s Mountain Leading award is no easy matter, however, particularly where differences exist in our understanding of what it might mean to be a ML (Ragné, 2010). A critical evaluation is therefore timely, particularly in view of UIMLA’s claim to represent an international profession and the need for both member and non-member countries to understand differing concepts of Mountain Leadership. An uncritical acceptance of the French-inspired ‘international standards’ has implications for the development of training programmes in countries that have already embarked on such schemes, and who might seek UIMLA accreditation, as well as those who may yet do so. Indeed, this understanding is essential if UIMLA is to avoid importing (or exporting) pre-packaged schemes without tailoring them carefully to local cultures, circumstances, needs and values (Boutroy, 2006; Cousquer, & Beames, forthcoming).

The focus on the British and French schemes has been chosen because these are the largest (in terms of active members) and longest established schemes (AEM, 1992; King, 2006, pp. 18–24; Long, 2003, pp. 181–184; SNAM, 2006). Additionally, the French legislative system ensures that Mountain Leading, in France, is restricted to those who have undertaken an approved training and assessment course; the French scheme is therefore not only the largest, but also that against which all other schemes are measured.

### Professionals and professionalism

The word *professional* can be used, in French and in English, as both a noun and an adjective. It can take on and convey a range of meanings, generating considerable confusion when used loosely, ambiguously or imprecisely (Evetts, 2006; Sciulli, 2005). It is therefore necessary to consider carefully what might be meant by this term. The term *professional* can be used to describe individuals who are members of the *professions* and who share certain characteristics that set them apart from non-professionals. This, of course, begs the question: What are to count as *professions* and what do these people share in common?

The following discussion of the two closely related concepts of professionals and professionalism is the product of an extensive review of the literature on the subject. It draws on discussions in a wide range of fields and seeks to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of what it might mean to be a professional. Recurring or otherwise significant ideas have been organised into related groupings and these themes are taken forward into the subsequent discussion of the IML's claims to professional status. The development of the analytic framework and the selection of themes followed an 'emic' rather than an 'etic' approach most akin to ethnographic content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 21). This process focuses on 'clear descriptions and definitions compatible with the materials', emphasises 'constant discovery and comparison of relevant situations', avoids an overly sequential and rigid structure and thereby allows categories and variables to emerge (Altheide, 1996, pp. 16–17). This recursive process was deemed most compatible with the reflexive approach adopted by the researchers in which definitions, meanings and assumptions were constantly challenged. Pre-determined ('etic') themes would not have allowed the texts to interact with the range of possible interpretations the concept of professionalism might reasonably adopt. Instead, the researchers developed an original, broader, more flexible, understanding of what may characterise a professional.

The criteria proposed below are summarised in Table 1 that will be later used as an instrument of analysis.

### *Paid work, social status and group membership*

Elliott (1972) traces the history of the professions back to the medieval universities that provided training to the original 'status professions' of law, medicine,



Table 1. Key characteristics of a professional.

Characteristic	Professional	Non-professional
(1) Payment	Payment received for professional services rendered (professional fees)	Unpaid Voluntary/amateur
(2) Quality of work	High. Demonstrating considerable skill, which in turn reflects the necessary time investment, making full-time status more likely	May not be high
(3a) Type of work	Typically non-manual	Often manual
(3b) Specialisation	Discretionary	Mechanical
(3c) Knowledge requirements	High proportion of formal knowledge and a moderate amount of practical knowledge	Emphasis more on everyday and tacit knowledge
(3d) Body of knowledge	Typically this is based on scientific understanding, values and applied skills. It is organised using theories and abstract concepts	May not have been subjected to scientific evaluation and organised using theories and abstract concepts
(4) Training	Significant. Undertaken in schools and colleges (usually of further education) where accredited professional training courses are provided. Training fully under the control of the profession	Undertaken on the job (e.g. apprenticeships) or in technical institutes where technicians are trained in the workplace, in the skills required by employers/industry
(5a) Credentialism	Officially sanctioned and publicly recognised diploma/certificate awarded following the successful treatment of a training course and assessment	Unregulated training programmes may lead to awards that are not officially sanctioned or widely recognised
(5b) Monopoly	The profession controls the training and certification in a defined body of intellectualised knowledge and skill. As such, it monopolises the practice of this discipline. This produces a 'social closure' to those who lack the necessary credentials and is further reinforced by the recognition of this award by insurance providers as a necessary prerequisite for professional insurance	The practice is uncontrolled and open to anyone who wants to lay claim to the practice

Table 1. Continued.

Characteristic	Professional	Non-professional
(6a) Autonomy and self-regulation	The profession is free to choose the ends towards which they work and responsible for regulating and enforcing standards (of work and of professional conduct)	Technicians apply technical solutions to achieve predetermined ends. The standard of work is often regulated by others within the workplace
(6b) Professional body	The profession has grown and organised itself into a professional body that represents the field. Membership of such bodies is often a requirement in order to practice	Lack of structure and organisation No close community of ideas, sentiments and interests to draw people together into a ‘family’
(7a) Transcendent values	Add moral substance to the technical content of their professional discipline Require professionals to act as the moral custodians of their knowledge and skill. This translates into a service ethic	Absent if a common purpose and identity does not unite a group of practitioners together
(7b) Codes of ethics	Codes of ethics, practice and conduct are established and vigorously, though sensitively enforced, usually by the professional body	No codes of ethics or practice in place. May have to rely on a related (e.g. industry) code or set of guidelines

the ministry and university teaching. According to Carr (2000), this group may embrace ‘other members of so-called vocations . . . but traditionally excludes plumbers, joiners and other tradesmen’ (p. 22). The French definition, however, tends to encompass any occupation, whether they be trades, crafts or lines of work requiring more specialist knowledge and training (Durkheim, 1992; Freidson, 2001). The linking of occupations to professions was first proposed by Hughes (1958) and is thought to reflect a shared professional identity associated with the experiences, understandings and expertise that are held in common (Evetts, 2013, p. 3). This more general use of the word *professional* is reflected in common French usage, in which it is possible to talk about a *professionnel du tennis* (professional tennis player), *professionnel de la biologie* (professional biologist), *professionnel du soleil* (holiday professional) and a *professionnel de la montagne* (mountain professional).

The first case contrasts professional and amateur status: where an amateur athlete plays for pleasure and may be rewarded with a cup or medal, the

professional plays for monetary gain (Chambers, 2006, p. 1216). Where the professional biologist works in a particular discipline and is likely to be highly skilled, experienced and knowledgeable, the holiday professional works within an industry and could just be renting sunbeds. Where both examples reflect the importance of undertaking one's work well, of doing a 'professional job', there are clearly differences in terms of the complexity of the two roles. This points to a certain self-aggrandisement on the part of the holiday professional and reflects a desire to appropriate a title and the status that may attach to it. This misappropriation of professional standing, and therefore of social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 240–241), in order to shape the production of self, recognises that professional status 'relies upon and presupposes distinction', for 'to become a professional is to attain middle class standing' (Blomley, 2005, pp. 620). But what of the mountain professionals: Are they guilty of appropriating professional status or is their claim a serious one?

In seeking to answer this question we must examine more closely the term *professional*, and the related concept of *professionalism*, and consider why they are difficult to define and much debated. A common focus of agreement, between consumers and academics alike, would be an emphasis on the quality of the work undertaken and the social mechanisms in place for ensuring this:

Professionalism refers to the occupational behaviours and practices of workers who not only have full-time jobs but also possess a clear sense of what their work is about and when it is effective. Some sort of collective – traditionally called a '*profession*' – guards and maintains this self-awareness. (Schinkel & Noordegraaf, 2011, p. 68)

Historically, these collectives developed as families – a parallel that Durkheim (1992) traced back to the Roman guilds, in his claim that:

The family is not solely or essentially a consanguine group. It is a group of individuals who happen to have been brought together within the political society by an especially close community of ideas, sentiments and interest. (p. 25)

The industrial revolution and the development of a global economy led to increasing specialisation and the emergence of an increasingly well-educated and trained middle (professional) class. Two forms of specialisation have been identified: mechanical and discretionary (Freidson, 2001, pp. 22–24), which broadly correspond with the organisational and occupational professionalisms described by Evetts (2013, pp. 10–11). The former corresponds with Adam Smith's pinmaking, in which production is mechanised and tasks are reduced to a repetitive simplicity, and are readily supplied by semi-skilled manual labourers. By contrast, discretionary specialisation requires the individual to exercise their judgement and remain sensitive to the variation found in individual cases.

The need for the professional to be able to exercise discretion reflects the complexity of the situations they are required to deal with. In the course of their work, a professional can be expected 'to encounter novel problems and dilemmas' to which there are no 'cut-and-dried technical answers' (Carr, 2000, p. 24). In such cases much independent judgement is needed if the professional is to 'distinguish unusual situations from everyday concerns and respond appropriately, mediating with generalities while always respecting the particularity of the case' (Bondi, Carr, Clark, & Clegg, 2011, p. 5).

The criteria that emerge from this description include payment and quality of work, but also encompass the type of work and degree of specialisation (Table 1, nos. 1–3b).

### ***Professional training programmes, credentialism and ethics***

That the public can trust professionals to make good decisions and resolve real-life problems stems from a confidence in their training and ability, as well as in their integrity and good intentions.

Two further characteristics of a professional thus emerge: The first reflects the growth and organisation of complex, fairly abstract bodies of knowledge and skill into organised disciplines; the second features an ethical dimension that requires the professional to place the public good – that of their client and of their professional discipline – above their own economic self-interest (Carr, 2000, pp. 24–26; Freidson, 2001, pp. 206–214; Van de Camp, Verhoeven-Dassen, Grol, & Bottema, 2004).

The acquisition, mastery and employment of a body of specialist expert knowledge, gained from following a programme of training is thus a foundation stone of professional practice. Freidson (2001, pp. 33–34) distinguishes between *everyday knowledge*, *practical knowledge*, *formal knowledge* and *tacit knowledge* and highlights the importance of formal knowledge, and to a lesser extent practical knowledge, to those specialists who are required to exercise mental (cf. manual) discretion in their work.

Formal knowledge cannot generally speaking be acquired through everyday or work-related activities, but must be acquired through study, as it 'is composed of bodies of information and ideas that are organised by theories and abstract concepts' (Freidson, 2001, p. 33). This 'body of knowledge that includes scientific bases, values and applied skills' (Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff, & Breunig, 2006, p. 25) constitutes the professional knowledge that must be transmitted to, and acquired by, each new generation of professionals. It is thus quite different from the tacit knowledge that describes how 'we can know more than we can tell' (Polanyi, 2009, p. 4), and can be viewed as a form of knowledge that remains personal, intuitive and resistant to formulations.

Recognition of this requirement for formal knowledge allows entry to the labour market to be controlled. This becomes possible where a training credential is established that can be awarded following the successful completion of a

programme of study. The creation of a professional school, college or institution, in turn, allows new knowledge and skill to be evaluated, approved and controlled. Freidson (2001) explains that this programme of study 'is also responsible for formalising the particular kind of knowledge and skill claimed by an occupation' (p. 84) and represents 'the authoritative source establishing the legitimacy of the practical work activities of the occupation's members, and it is the primary source of the status of its members and their personal, public and official identities' (p. 84). It also contributes to the development of commitment to the occupation as a life career and to a shared identity, a feeling of community or solidarity amongst all those who have passed through it.

In Freidson's (2001) ideal-type professional, faculty members are able to free themselves from the work place and undertake research and scholarship that allows them 'to codify and refine what is already known' (p. 97), whilst innovating and experimenting to develop new knowledge and techniques. This ongoing refinement and expansion of knowledge and skills contributes to the profession's claim for dominion over this body of knowledge.

These points are important for they allow the profession to claim reliability for the credentials awarded following such approved programmes of study. This translates into accreditation – that is to say, public sanction and official recognition. Where professions have achieved protected status and a monopoly over their practice, it is because the state, as 'arbiter or facilitator of professional standing' has seen fit to grant 'sovereign powers of self-regulation and accreditation' (Blomley, 2005, p. 621). As such, the professional is authorised to carry out tasks and provide services that others are not allowed to perform (Wynia, 2010, p. 210). This allows 'externally imposed rules (from states or organisations) governing the work to be minimised' and 'the exercise of discretionary decision making and good judgement' maximised (Evetts, 2013, p. 8). As noted earlier, the public's trust in a professional is also based on their confidence that they are dealing with an ethical person who can be expected to subsume their own interests to those of the client.

The increasing complexity of specialised professional practice elicits many conflicts of interest and ethical dilemmas that provide a critical test of professionalism. These dilemmas exercise the minds of professional bodies and their members, and have led to the formulation and ongoing development of codes of practice/ethics that provide guidance on matters of professional conduct. In considering the ethical dimension of professional practice, we are led to consider what the characteristic ends (or *telos*) of such a practice might be. Carr (2000) asserts that professionals engage in a moral project, for they are involved in the 'practice of activities and endeavours whose ends and purposes are matters of genuine ethical controversy' (p. 29). It is not therefore sufficient to perform a task well, for to do so is to focus on the means without considering the end goal. A professional practitioner should therefore also be committed to the development of the 'internal goods': the 'desirable outcomes characteristically aimed at through a practice' (Dunne, 2011, p. 14).

The themes that emerge here reflect the emergence in modern societies of an advanced division of labour and the importance of trust in economic relations (Evetts, 2013, p. 3). They include a growing body of formal knowledge that must be imparted through approved training programmes, which in turn lead to credentialism, monopolies, and the creation of self-regulating professional bodies (Table 1, nos. 3c–6) that protect both the public and the profession's reputation. Codes of ethics that reflect a profession's transcendent values (Table 1, nos. 7a–7b) are two further, arguably essential, themes that become necessary if professionals are to be worthy of the trust placed in them by society.

### *Professional practice and fields*

In the process of developing a distinct and coherent professional identity, a profession must consider what it does. Dunne (2011) claims that the concept of a profession is defined in that of a practice, which he defines as:

... a more or less coherent and complex set of activities that has evolved co-operatively and cumulatively over time and that exists most significantly in the community of those who are its practitioners – so long as they are committed to sustaining its internal goals and its proper standards of excellence. (p. 14)

MacIntyre (2007) maintains that the possession and exercise of the virtues enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices (p. 191). This being the case, the development of practical wisdom (*phronesis*), or 'good judgement', is as essential a preparation for professional practice as the development of technical competency. Indeed, 'there can be no reasoning about means to ends except in the light of certain assumptions about what is or is not humanly worth pursuing' (Carr, 2000, p. 76). The emphasis on evaluative reasoning is particularly important, some would say essential, in the caring professions, for they are concerned with human well-being and flourishing. The seeking of worthwhile ends confronts professionals with the reality that such ends are inevitably and invariably contested, for 'human welfare and flourishing are matters of value rather than fact' (Bondi et al., 2011, p. 2). Professionals, as autonomous agents, are required to choose the ends towards which they work, whereas technicians apply a technical solution to achieve predetermined ends.

Professional training programmes should therefore concentrate on developing the individual's practical wisdom as well as their technical competencies and technical reasoning. Failure to do so results in a practice becoming 'technicised' (Dunne, 2011, pp. 16–17). This may, in part, be driven by the perceived need to produce generalisable formulae, which are procedures or rules that can be applied to the problems that present in practice. Such technical rationalisation aspires to a practitioner-proof mode of practice and denies the practitioner the ability to respond to the individual particularities of a given case.



Where Dunne (2011) chooses to view professions as practices, Bourdieu rejects the ideology of professionalism, claiming that it gets in the way of a truly critical study of the object of sociological research due to its failure to scrutinise the conditions of the possibilities of the professions (Schinkel & Noordegraaf, 2011, pp. 73–74). According to Bourdieu (1991), ‘one cannot establish a science of classifications without establishing a science of the struggle over classifications and without taking into account the position occupied, in this struggle for the power of knowledge, for power through knowledge’ (pp. 241–242).

In its place, Bourdieu advocates the utilisation of the more objective concept of the ‘field’, which can be defined as ‘a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, appointments and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities’ (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002, pp. 21–22). Individuals of a similar set of dispositions, or *habitus*, collaborate together to produce works of social construction, that draw ‘discrete units out of indivisible continuity, difference out of the undifferentiated’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 479). Such arbitrary differences are naturalised through power, and are thus accorded legitimacy and distinction. Bourdieu’s critique is that the concept of a professional functions as an *illusio* in occupational fields (Schinkel & Noordegraaf, 2011, p. 79) and that this source of bias must be recognised in our attempt to apprehend the object of research. Perhaps most importantly, we must be aware of the ‘historical genesis of power-driven autonomous fields’ and recognise the ‘dynamic nature and vulnerability of professional fields’ (p. 84). This allows us to better understand historically constituted givens, their genesis and evolution, and the ways in which they are engaged in struggles for capital within specific occupational fields.

It is thus clear that professional work can be defined, interpreted and used in many ways, with these evolving over time (Evetts, 2013). As fields of human endeavour, they can be populated by moral communities that seek to establish a collective identity whilst maintaining control over a set of practices. This can be viewed ideologically as a means of ‘establishing exclusive ownership of an area of expertise and knowledge and the power to define the nature of the problems in that area as well as the control of access to potential solutions’ (Evetts, 2013, p. 11).

The foregoing discussion has highlighted the complexities inherent in defining what it means to be a professional. MLTUK<sup>5</sup> (2005) defines a professional as, ‘Someone who behaves in a thorough and conscientious manner, or someone who is paid for their services, or someone who is bound by a code of conduct and is overseen by a professional association’ (p. 27). The ML has evolved over the last 50 years both in France and the UK, and it is to their claims to professional status that we now turn. The IML, both in France and the UK, has become a ‘*professionnel de la montagne*’, for their work is clearly defined. But to what extent is the IML more than an occupation? To what extent do they demonstrate the characteristics of a professional?

In order to answer these questions, the characteristics that emerged from this review of the French and UK literature on professionalism have been drawn together by the authors and are presented in [Table 1](#) (at the beginning of this section). These characteristics will serve to structure the thematic analysis – the methods of which are now explained.

### *Methodology*

Professionalism is clearly a complex, socially constructed phenomenon that are produced from the practices of a professional group of individuals and the assemblage of networks that bind them together, and which conspire to produce their common identity. As such, it is emergent within practice and is an exquisitely dynamic process that contributes significantly to the territorialisation of the professional landscape. Sellar (2009) draws on the work of Manuel Delanda to explore the potential offered by *assemblage theory* as a tool for the analysis of the complexity and transactional nature within the occupational sciences.

Delanda (2006) suggests that processes of territorialisation are spatial in the sense that they ‘define or sharpen the boundaries of actual territories’ (p. 13), whilst also being non-spatial. Non-spatial processes of territorialisation ‘increase the internal homogeneity of an assemblage’ and ‘include the sorting processes which exclude a certain category of people from membership of an organisation’ (p. 13). In the case of the IML, the training and assessment process acts as a gateway to membership of a UIMLA approved national body. This ‘sorting process’ is arguably the single most important homogenising factor to which IMLs are exposed, for the trajectories taken both before and after training and assessment are highly individualised and heterogeneous ([Figure 1](#)).

Any serious claim to professional status requires that admission to the ranks of a professional body truly reflect those high standards of practice that membership has espoused and guarantees. The programmes that train and assess to this standard, and thereby serve as a gateway to the profession, can therefore be expected to enact the various elements of professionalism that we have identified. Graduates of the schemes are deemed ready for the work place: safe to work as IMLs and worthy of the public’s trust. Our focus on the training and assessment process is therefore justified.

In seeking to evaluate the aspects of the IML’s claim to professional status that emerge from the French and British IML training schemes, we chose to examine the key documents that inform and participate in these schemes. These documents are not viewed as inert objects whose content can be studied (Prior, 2011), however. Instead, it is recognised that they have to be interpreted on a recurrent basis, and it is in doing so that they come to have meaning. The authors’ own relationship(s) with these documents as MLs who have progressed through the British scheme and who work with French

IMLs therefore needs to be recognised. The first-named author is both a French and British national and, as a native French speaker, was able to work with the French texts and provide translations where necessary.

The bounded nature of a case study was useful in permitting us to delve deeply into issues that are intricately intertwined with political, social, and historical contexts (Stake, 1995, p. 17). We further argue that a detailed understanding of the various aspects of professionalism, professional identities and claims to professional status that emerge from these two schemes justifies the choice of a comparative study, whilst allowing us to remain wary of the debates surrounding case-study research. Tight (2010) highlights the need to avoid such confusing terminology and focus instead on how data was created, collected and analysed (p. 338). We therefore emphasise that these two in-depth studies have both intrinsic and instrumental value (Stake, 2005, p. 445) to French and British IMLs, as well as offering possibilities for professionals across UIMLA to reflect on their own claims to professional status and how these continue to be negotiated.

The desk-based analysis featured an iterative reading of the key documents that have been generated from within each IML training and assessment scheme, and include the legislative acts, syllabuses and candidate 'guide books'. This recursive reading of the selected 'communications' allowed an ongoing constant comparison to be made. The sampling undertaken followed a process of 'progressive theoretical sampling' (Altheide, 1996, p. 33), by responding sensitively to new insights into the subject matter. It is argued

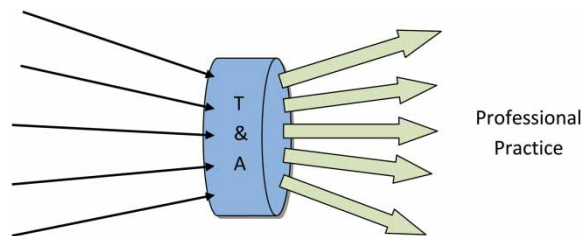


Figure 1. The trajectories of the IML both before and after training and assessment (T&A) are multiple and heterogeneous. Whilst the British candidate will have passed through the Summer ML scheme, their background can be quite diverse with many individuals having had careers in fields as diverse as education, the services, health care and IT. Professional trajectories after training and assessment can be equally varied with many British IMLs only using their award on a part-time basis. Passage through the training and assessment process is the one structural element to which all candidates are exposed. It brings trainers/assessors and candidates together for an intensive formative experience that has the potential to lay down significant ideas that will structure the IML's emergent professional identity. During this time, experiences are shared, conversations had, values explored and educational material studied and digested. These various elements constitute a complex bundle, or assemblage, of elements that inform the IML's future development as a mountain professional. It is suggested that this is similarly true of the French scheme.

that this intensive examination afforded our analysis an acceptable level of rigour, which enabled us to better ‘determine the presence, meanings and relationships of certain words or concepts within the text’ (Gratton & Jones, 2011, p. 185). We do not claim, however, that our interpretation of these texts is the only legitimate one (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 31). Instead, we seek to ‘explicate the context that guides their inferences’ (p. 22), and thereby ask the reader to consider our rigorous analysis of these documents trustworthy (Stake, 1995).

The essential primary documents (legislative acts, syllabuses and candidate ‘guide books’) have been sourced, together with some supporting secondary materials:

#### *French documents*

- (i) The modified *Arrêté du 21 juillet 1994* on the conditions of delivery of the *diplôme d’accompagnateur en moyenne montagne du Brevet d’État d’alpinisme*
- (ii) *Guide du Candidat* (SNAM, n.d.)
- (iii) *Guide du Stagiaire* (SNAM, 2009)

#### *UK documents*

- (i) IML Handbook (MLTUK, 2009)
- (ii) Guide for candidates for the British Association of IMLs (BAIMLs): IML training and assessment scheme (BAIML, 2008)

These documents are the current texts produced by the French and British professional associations and training bodies. They therefore meet the criteria of authenticity, reliability and credibility, outlined by Scott (1990) for establishing the quality of documentary evidence (p. 6). These are the only official texts; equivalent units of analysis have thus been selected and thereby maintain the validity of the comparison (O’Connor & Faas, 2012, p. 6). It should, however, be recognised that the texts have been produced for slightly different audiences and this is not a like-for-like comparison.

The French syllabus is set down in law and publicly available. It is primarily aimed at those officials responsible for delivering the training programmes that lead to the award of a state diploma. As such, the text has to be interpreted by the course organisers when designing and structuring training programmes (Géhin, 2007). The IML handbook is the equivalent UK text but has been written for three specific audiences: candidates, trainers and assessors; it is a particularly transparent manual that seeks to explicate the aims and substance of the training and assessment programmes. The other selected texts are published by the professional associations for candidates seeking to join (*Guide du Candidat*) or progress through the schemes (*Guide du Stagiaire*); the BAIML guide is therefore equivalent to the two French guides.

The last of Scott's (1990) quality criteria is 'meaning', which goes beyond the literal to engage in a hermeneutic process of interpretation. It is recognised that 'texts inform an analyst about extra-textual phenomena, about meanings, consequences or particular uses' (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 32) and that this process is an interpretative one. In structuring this research, attention has therefore been paid to two key criteria (Scott, 1990):

- (i) The meanings ascribed, both literally and interpretatively, by the authors and the historical assumptions that have given rise to these meanings.
- (ii) The meanings and explanations proposed by the analyst following their study of the documents.

Content, or textual, analysis therefore involves 'mediation between the frames of reference of the researcher and those who produced the text' (Scott, 1990, p. 31). In seeking to produce the best possible understanding of the frame of reference of the texts, an in depth historical study of the field has been undertaken (Cousquer, & Beames, forthcoming).

The framework for the analysis of the IML's claim to professional status elaborated earlier in this paper, following an extensive review of the literature on this subject (Table 1), was used to guide the recursive reading of the key texts.

### **The IML'S claim to professional status**

The key characteristics of a professional developed in this paper and described in Table 1 have been grouped into seven key themes that recognise the closely related characteristics and relationships between, for example, autonomy, self-regulation and professional bodies. The extent to which the French and British training schemes and syllabuses reflect these themes will now be considered. Table 2 provides a summary of these findings.

### ***Payment***

Payment is one of the simplest defining characteristics of a professional. The French scheme unequivocally views the *Accompagnateur* as a paid professional and emphasises this repeatedly. The *Guide du Stagiaire* stipulates that all *Accompagnateurs* (including trainees) should make themselves aware of local markets and respect the going rates of employment (SNAM, 2009, p. 7). The *Guide* advises *stagiaires* to avoid unscrupulous organisations, who exploit people as cheap seasonal labour and provide little training in return. Further on, the *Guide* suggests that where a *stagiaire* undertakes to supervise a group, they should receive the same payment as a qualified *Accompagnateur* (p. 8).

This contrasts markedly with the emphasis in BAIML's Guide for Candidates (2008, p. 10), which states that IMLs may gain their qualification 'for

Table 2. Characteristics of a professional as reflected in the training and assessment of the French and British IML awards.

Characteristic	French scheme	British scheme
(1) Payment	A paid professional! The Accompagnateur scheme was developed as a means of providing work to members of the mountain community	A significant volunteer sector with many members working as MLs on an occasional or part-time basis during their holidays from paid employment. Many ML award holders are employed within the education sector rather than being self-employed
(2) Quality of work	High standards of skill and knowledge demanded  An emphasis on written work under assessment. Significant importance attached to the work placement	High standards of skill and knowledge demanded, especially with regard to navigation  A qualified IML will have undergone 14 days of continuous assessment
(3a) Type of work	Both manual and non-manual reflecting a move away from hard technical skills to soft skills. The ability to interpret and explain the mountain environment is increasingly emphasised. The French scheme was one of the first to emphasise environmental knowledge	Both manual and non-manual reflecting a move away from hard technical skills to soft skills. The ability to interpret and explain the mountain environment is increasingly emphasised. Environmental knowledge has been accorded increasing importance across the three UK ML awards
(3b) Specialisation	Discretionary: the IML has to be able to respond to the uniqueness of the case and demonstrates considerable autonomy in their work French IMLs are likely to know their own valley and surrounding area extremely well and may therefore be less likely to travel	Discretionary: the IML has to be able to respond to the uniqueness of the case and demonstrates considerable autonomy in their work. It could be argued that the British IML needs to be able to adapt to a wider range of situations because they travel more extensively
(3c) Knowledge requirements	Significant requirement both for formal and practical knowledge	Significant requirement both for formal and practical knowledge



Table 2. Continued.

Characteristic	French scheme	British scheme
(3d) Body of knowledge	Increasingly draws on scientific understanding, values and skills, especially with regard to meteorology, nivology, mountain medicine and ecology. 200 hours of contact time	Increasingly draws on scientific understanding, values and skills, especially with regard to meteorology, nivology, mountain medicine and ecology. Approximately 310 hours of contact time
(4) Training	Formal training provided by approved regional centres. Syllabus written down in law Requirement for student to undertake a work placement with an approved IML	Formal training provided at one of two national centres. Established syllabus. Requirement for student to log experience (quality mountain days) independently before presenting for assessment
(5a) Credentialism	Training and assessment strictly regulated. A single Accompagnateur award is recognised although other awards ( <i>brevet fédéraux</i> ) are available for the volunteer sector	Training well regulated. The existence of separate national and international awards <sup>a</sup> as well as an expansion in the number of alternative walking awards <sup>b</sup> available in the UK is potentially confusing
(5b) Monopoly	Social closure established under French law	No social closure established in the UK. Anyone could lead a group in the mountains without an award. Insurance companies and employers left to set stipulate requirements in terms of qualifications and experience
(6a) Autonomy and self-regulation	Work undertaken is generally autonomous although the ends served are often negotiated with employers and clients. A clear code of professional conduct sets expected standards	Work undertaken is generally autonomous although the ends served are often negotiated with employers and clients. Work ongoing to develop and approve an up-to-date code of professional conduct

Table 2. Continued.

Characteristic	French scheme	British scheme
(6b) Professional body	IMLs have to be registered with the Sports Ministry in order to be legally recognised and permitted to work as an IML. SNAM is one of two professional bodies. Membership is not required in law	BAIML claims that membership is required in order to work officially as a recognised IML. No other registration is required
(7a) Transcendent values	As self-employed individuals, work can be refused. In the mountains, however, a clear service ethic that prioritises client safety prevails	Safety is of paramount importance and informs a culture of care
(7b) Codes of ethics	Deontological code referred to in the Guide du Stagiaire	No overt mention of ethics made in the documents studied. The existing code of professional conduct is outdated, little known, and is currently undergoing review

<sup>a</sup>The UK has separate Summer and Winter ML Awards that are distinct from the IML award.

<sup>b</sup>These include the new Hill and Moorland Award, previously the Walking Group Leader Award, the Lowland Leader Award and the Basic Expedition Leader Award (BELA).

an employer (e.g. a school) where they are on a salary anyway ... and others choose to work as an IML in their holidays from an office job, whilst some work freelance' (p. 10). BAIML does not fix rates for members, and notes that IMLs are free to set 'their daily tariffs based on how they value their services and why they are undertaking the work' (p. 10).

Reflecting the origins of the ML scheme in the voluntary, outdoor education and teaching sectors, the UK position recognises that IMLs may undertake work on a voluntary basis. In doing so, however, it may unwittingly undermine the professional's right to be paid for their work and open the door to exploitative practices. This is possible because the IML can rely on other sources of income if working during their holidays or retirement. This, in turn, raises two contradictory characteristics of the IML: the quality of the work versus its full-time nature.

### *Quality of work*

Quality of work appears to be very high in both schemes, regardless of whether work is remunerated or not. This is perhaps reflected most dramatically in the

degree of navigational skill and proficiency expected within the UK scheme. The nature of the UK hills and mountains requires the ML to be able to navigate in all conditions and situations (MLTUK, 2009, p. 12). Langmuir (1969) emphasised that ‘absolute certainty in blind navigation in the most severe weather conditions is required’ (p. 6). A very high standard of blind navigation, day or night, summer or winter, has come to characterise the UK schemes (Langmuir, 1995, p. 1; MLTUK, 2006, pp. 20–22), where a reliance on micro-navigation is prioritised. This differs from the macro-navigation required for ‘confident navigation on paths over terrain that is more mountainous than the UK’ (MLTUK, 2009, p. 31).

The above example illustrates the high expectations set of candidates with regard to this technical competency. Similar standards are, arguably, expected across the syllabus with a pass being defined as ‘where the candidate has demonstrated a proper knowledge and application of the course syllabus and has shown the necessary experience and attributes for international mountain leading’ (MLTUK, 2009, p. 6).

In the absence of a published marking scheme, it is hard to be precise about the relative importance of different areas of the syllabus. The original Summer ML scheme required a pass mark of 60% in each of three one-hour theoretical papers (mountain safety, weather and navigation), which were then considered together with the field assessor’s written report (Langmuir, 1969, pp. 48–49). The exam papers have since been substituted by home papers in the Summer, Winter and International ML schemes, which are not marked. Instead, the emphasis is placed on a realistic and lengthy practical assessment: five days for the summer ML, four for the summer IML and five for the winter IML.

By comparison, the French scheme continues to emphasise written work, with the *stagiaires* having to sit several assessments and present a 60–80-page *mémoire*, which is written during their work placement (SNAM, 2009, p. 11). The final exam, by contrast, only lasts half a day, although it is assigned a coefficient that gives it equal weighting to the *mémoire* and oral exam together (SNAM, 2009, p. 4). Amongst the various modules, a mark of 30/60 is required in the mountain safety and navigation module, where other modules can be passed with a mark of at least 6 out of 20. This reflects the emphasis in both schemes on safe practice, which Géhin (2007, p. 42) suggests helps to meet public expectations in this area and has contributed to the international development of the award.

### ***Specialisation and body of knowledge***

The content of the ML syllabus has expanded considerably since its inception in the mid-1960s. The third edition of Langmuir consisted of 472 pages, where the first edition contained only 89. Additional chapters included new sections on ‘First Aid’ and ‘Nutrition’, whilst the sections on ‘Access and Conservation’ and ‘Mountain Rescue’ were rewritten (Langmuir, 1995, p. viii). In the most

recent handbook, a chapter devoted to understanding the environment appears (Long, 2003, pp. 93–96). The reading list in the IML handbook (MLTUK, 2009, pp. 27–28) suggests five core readings and a further 37 subject specific texts. Of these, seven are on the environment and mirror the growing importance of environmental knowledge within the syllabus. The *Guide du Candidat* similarly describes the *Accompagnateur* as ‘un médiateur du milieu montagnard’ (p. 13) who brings to life the mountain walk with their pedagogy. This deeper understanding of the mountain environment in all its aspects requires an ever-widening body of knowledge. The significance of environmental knowledge can only continue to grow as the IML becomes established as the guide best qualified to interpret the mountain environment but this body of knowledge also relates to safety issues, such as a scientific understanding of weather systems and snow pack behaviour.

Allison and Telford (2005, p. 27) point out that the knowledge base in outdoor education remains relatively small compared to other professions. Whilst this may be true, it would appear that, where the IML is concerned, an increasing body of knowledge is being developed and integrated into practice.

The challenge of including all this knowledge within the training course is well recognised and much is left to the candidate who is expected to develop a ‘broad mountain-related general knowledge, environmental awareness and an appreciation of mountains internationally’ during the consolidation period (MLTUK, 2009, p. 5). The UK IML syllabus lists 30 learning objectives (pp. 11–14) – some of which are highly complex, with as many as 11 subsections. The ML<sup>6</sup> can expect to receive a minimum of 120 hours contact time with instructional staff (MLTUK, 2006, pp. 7–8), before receiving a further 10 days’ training and nine days assessment over the summer and winter IML programme. This equates to a total of 310 hours, if a day equals 10 hours of contact time.

In the French scheme, the teaching of the 47 fundamental and 17 complementary competencies is squeezed into 200 hours of teaching time. This challenges instructors, who must engineer a careful selection of material in order to find the right balance between classroom and practical sessions (Géhin, 2007, pp. 26–31). In particular, this creates significant challenges in terms of the development of a certain ‘intelligence générale’ (p. 28) that seeks to integrate knowledge into practice and foster a seamless proficiency in instructors.

### **Training**

Training and assessment for the IML in the UK is provided by Plas y Brenin and Glenmore Lodge. Only these two centres are approved by the MLTUK to deliver these courses (MLTUK, 2009, p. 1), although in recent years Plas Y Brenin have been the sole providers of training and assessment. In France, each region has its own training centre(s) that are approved and licensed by

the Sports Ministry under Article 6 of the modified *Arrêté du 21 juillet 1994*. There were nine regional centres offering entrance exams across France in 2012 (FFMM, 2012, p. 5), and many organisations hosting courses that prepare candidates for the entrance exam (*Guide du Candidat*, p. 7) further adding to training provision.

In the UK, training providers have the freedom to run a course that satisfies the requirements of the board and of the majority of course members, and which makes best use of prevailing weather conditions (MLTUK, 2009, p. 29). The content of the training may therefore vary, but the syllabus is prescribed and has been largely written by the profession as recognised in the handbook's acknowledgements (p. 1). Perhaps, most importantly, MLTUK, as a regulating body, is representative of the profession. Its board is made up of two representatives from each of the four national boards as well as representatives from the National Centres and the Mountain Guiding, Instructing and Leading professional associations that, as of 2013, produce a common journal, called 'The Professional Mountaineer'.

In France, the syllabus is written in law and guides the course providers who must then interpret these directives accordingly (Géhin, 2007, pp. 27–29). The SNAM claims to constantly monitor and input into the evolving training programmes (SNAM, 2009, p. 3). This appears to be in a lobbying capacity, however, for the SNAM is a union and therefore represents its members, though claiming to represent 'the profession'. The syllabus is, defined and determined by the state (*les pouvoirs publics*), who consult with the professional bodies. This has led to difficulties in the development and evolution of policies and practice(s) amongst mountain professionals in France, where control of training does not appear to be in the hands of the profession.

### ***Credentialism and monopoly***

The French and UK courses are both officially sanctioned and publicly recognised. This is perhaps more so in France, where the state legislation emphasises that the *Accompagnateur en Moyenne Mountain* award (or AMM<sup>7</sup> – the IML equivalent) is the only walking award recognised as a *Brevet d'État d'Alpinisme*. This designation distinguishes it from the other walking awards available in France (FFMM, 2012, p. 5), including the *Brevet d'Aptitude à la Fonction d'Animateur*, *Certificat de Qualification Professionnelle d'Animateur de loisirs sportifs*, *Brevet professionnel de la jeunesse, de l'éducation populaire et du sport* and the *Brevet fédéraux (Animateur ou Accompagnateur de randonnée pédestre)*.

None of the above awards qualify a leader to undertake paid work with groups in the mountain environment, although the *brevet fédéraux* is relevant, but non-compulsory, in the voluntary sector. The professional (i.e. paid) activity of the *Accompagnateur* is thus subject to regulations that produce a legal barrier

to those who lack the necessary credentials. A monopoly over practice therefore exists in France, but not in the UK.

In the UK, National Governing Body awards are seen as the industry standard but are not compulsory, either for voluntary or paid work. There is thus no legal restriction to practice (i.e. no social closure) and the title of ‘Mountain Guide’ or ‘ML’ is not protected in the same way that ‘Veterinary Surgeon’ is, for example, under the Veterinary Surgeons Act.

The UK IML Award is recognised in France and continental Europe. In the words of Steve Long, the IML Award ‘is one of the few qualifications that has achieved this “Holy Grail” in mountaineering’, namely ‘cross-border recognition’ (BAIML, 2008, p. 3). As such, it can be argued that UK IML award holders are members of a select body of people who can work as IMLs in France or anywhere else where this award becomes a legal requirement.

### ***Professional body, autonomy and self-regulation***

Both France and the UK have established professional bodies in the SNAM and BAIML. It is important to point out, however, that these bodies represent both the profession and the members. There is therefore a potential conflict of interests in both cases. Membership of BAIML is a clear requirement of practice and it is this professional association that issues the carnet (MLTUK, 2009, p. 9). In France, the *carte professionnelle*, or carnet, is delivered by the relevant offices of the Sport Ministry. Membership of the SNAM is not therefore a requirement of practice.

The nature of the work undertaken by IMLs is highly complex and requires experience, good judgement and practical wisdom. In particular, the IML must respect the principles of safe practice and is both able, and required, to exercise their judgement in order to ensure the safety of their group is respected. The *Guide du Stagiaire* (p. 6) affirms that it is they who decide the size of their group after taking into account the abilities of the group, length and difficulty of the itinerary and prevailing conditions. The IML handbook similarly emphasises the IML’s ‘overall responsibility for the group members for an extended period whilst travelling’ and the ‘need to ensure all relevant safety considerations have been addressed’ (MLTUK, 2009, p. 18).<sup>8</sup> The autonomy of the IML in the field is therefore clear. Whilst it is likely that the standards of work and professional conduct can be judged by one’s peers, there is no mention of any disciplinary procedures or committees to enforce standards of professional conduct within the texts studied. This probably reflects the absence of any such structure, which in turn may be explained by the small membership of BAIML.

### ***Transcendent values and codes of ethics***

The clear moral dimension present in both the French and UK training schemes is an acute awareness of the vital importance of safe practice. The *Guide du*



*Stagiaire* includes an excerpt from the SNAM's *Code de Recommandations Déontologiques*, in which the *Accompagnateur* working with (or for) others is urged to refuse any work that he deems to expose his group to abnormal or excessive risks. They are further requested, in Article 10, to report to the relevant authorities any difficulties that they encounter, which they deems incompatible with their professional duties (SNAM, 2009, pp. 6–7). When working, they are also to report any unusual dangers they encounter on the mountain (Article 14) and to educate the public about the need to respect the environment through their behaviour, advice and vigilance (Appendix 6). Safety and the management of risk are the overwhelming preoccupation of the MLT's National Guidelines (MLTUK, 2005).

Initially, the ML scheme urged candidates 'to know and conform to' the Country Code (Langmuir, 1969, p. 48), an emphasis that continues through into the most recent guide (Long, 2003, p. 82). No mention is made, however, of a professional code of ethics. Remarkably, in both the IML handbook and the BAIML Guide, there is no mention made of a professional code of ethics – neither does the word 'ethics' appear at all. The National Guidelines briefly acknowledge the leader's responsibilities towards the environment and advise that the attention of participants be drawn to relevant codes of practice (MLTUK, 2005, p. 12). It therefore appears that the British currently rely on external codes of practice.

## Conclusions

This detailed review of the subject of professional status and professionalism provides a framework for the future development of the IML as an established profession within the EU and beyond. Perhaps most importantly, it establishes a clear distinction between the conduct expected of a professional (i.e. professionalism) and the conditions that must be met for a worker or practitioner to claim professional status.

In both France and the UK, the IML has made considerable steps towards claiming professional status. It is clear that in terms of the criteria outlined here, this claim is increasingly justified. In particular, we find that the IML has taken ownership of the field and practice of Mountain Leading through the appropriation of a body of knowledge and a set of skills that allows them to claim that they are specialists in both interpreting the mountain environment and leading groups safely through it. The qualification has legal sanction in France and has established itself as the industry standard in the UK, where it is widely recognised by employers and insurance companies alike. This is, in part, because mountain walking involves a significant amount of physical risk (Barton, 2006; Fulbrook, 2005) and today's society increasingly looks to professionals to undertake risk assessments and use their expert knowledge to deal with the hazards and uncertainties faced by their clients (Evetts, 2013, p. 4). These uncertainties are significant in the mountain environment and it

is plain that the IML's professional practice requires that they draw on specialist knowledge, technical skills, and experience that in turn enable them to employ discretionary judgement whilst managing complex cases.

The international recognition and regard accorded to member countries of UIMLA and the continuing growth of this organisation are evidence that the credentials of the IML scheme are increasingly recognised, both within the profession and by the wider public. This will be further reinforced if the IML is recognised, along with Mountain Guides, doctors, nurses, and engineers, as an award that warrants the issuing of the forthcoming European Professional Card<sup>9</sup> (Cliff, 2013). There is, however, little evidence of homogenisation across these two schemes and it must be recognised that there are significant differences<sup>10</sup> between a British and a French IML (Cousquer, & Beames, forthcoming). Recognition of a minimum core standard across all UIMLA member countries necessitates accommodating both obvious similarities and significant differences.

Whilst professional courtesy, recognition and respect is afforded to an IML from another country, one's understanding of what it is to be an IML is grounded in the national training schemes and one's own professional experience. Increasing travel and exchange opportunities can only serve to broaden this understanding.

Where professional ethics and standards in training and assessment have been established, it does appear that the relatively small membership of BAIML has limited its ability to establish a code of ethics and a set of disciplinary procedures. That said, it should be noted that such codes can still be poorly written, overly stringent or indeed too lax (Bloland & Tempel, 2004, p. 10), and are reliant both on the strength of the association to enforce them and on the willingness of the membership to comply with and uphold these codes. These are areas in which further development work is required and it is encouraging that BAIML are currently undertaking a review on this very area (Richard Ayres, personal communication).

As it stands, the ultimate sanction that a disciplinary investigation can impose on a member is the withdrawal of the carnet. In the absence of any clear legal protection of the IML, it will be difficult to prevent an IML from continuing to work as such. Employers, insurance companies and authorities approving IMLs for work should be encouraged to check their qualifications and professional registration. A request for a 'letter of good standing' from the professional body could be developed as a means of checking that a foreign national is not subject to any disciplinary procedures and is up-to-date with their continuing professional development requirements, first aid training and professional insurance.

In the case of the two countries studied here, IMLs can continue to build their reputation and assert their claim to professional status, providing they understand the complexities and nuances of this endeavour. It remains less clear how other countries that aspire to tread this path towards the

professionalisation of their MLs may proceed. Future research might consider how countries with a substantial mountain tourism industry, but without some of the key elements that justify a claim to professional status, might organise themselves to follow a path towards accreditation.

## Notes

1. The UIAA, otherwise known as the International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation, today has a global presence across five continents with 80 member associations from 50 countries and claims to represent the interests of some 2.9 million people. It is recognised by the International Olympic Committee as the international federation representing the sports of mountaineering and climbing. In 2009, the UIAA, at its General Assembly, approved the Mountain Ethics Declaration. This code for mountaineering values spelt out sportsmanship ethics and highlighted the need for mountaineers to respect both cultures and the environment.
2. The concept of zoning into back country, front country and tourism centre areas is proposed and deployed by Nepal and Chipeniuk (2005) as a way of classifying mountain activities and planning how the impact of mountain tourism in these areas can best be managed.
3. And, arguably, for inclusion on the EPC programme!
4. According to figures from Mountain Training (as of February 2014) a total of 665 individuals have completed the UK EML/IML scheme since its inception. Of these, 126 were female, 538 male with one undeclared. The vast majority of award holders completed their award within the last 10 years: 414 between 2003 and 2013. By contrast, the number completing the UK's summer ML award since its inception in 1964 is 18,703 (7137 over the last 10 years), whilst a total of 2469 individuals have completed the winter ML award since its inception in 1965 (814 over the last 10 years). Current BAIML membership stands at 509 (this includes 366 full active, 3 life members, 60 full inactive, 23 aspirant, 27 aspirant inactive, 6 retired and 24 affiliate members).
5. Mountain Leader Training UK is now known as Mountain Training.
6. The British IML has to complete their summer ML award before registering on the IML award scheme. In France there is no distinction between the national and international awards.
7. National legislation still uses the acronym AMM. The profession has, however, dropped the term 'moyenne' and now describe themselves as *Accompagnateur en Montagne*.
8. Increasingly the group can be considered to include in-country staff (i.e. porters) and pack animals (Cousquer & Allison, 2012).
9. The EU is currently seeking to develop a European Professional Card that will allow qualified professionals to move across borders and make it easier for authorities to check on qualifications. The EU is particularly interested in professions whose 'members regularly cross borders, where members are trained and assessed to the same standards and where there is a health and safety issue for members of the public' (Cliff, 2013, p. 31).
10. These include the large number of part-time and volunteer leaders within the British scheme, the inclusion of canyoning as an option within the French scheme and the scope for the use of crampons within the British winter ML programme.

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